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Easter 7 • Acts 1:12–26 • June 1, 2014

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Acts 1:12–26 narrates what the followers of Jesus did after his ascension. They remained in Jerusalem as Jesus had commanded (Acts 1:4). Luke names the eleven disciples and then summarizes that they were together in unity dedicated to prayer.

“All these were continuously devoted (present participle) with one accord to prayer together with women, also with Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers” (Acts 1:14). Jesus is God in human flesh. God in human flesh as true man has a human mother and human brothers. To emphasize the biblical Christology we confess with the early church that Mary is “the mother of God.” We can also say that these are “the brothers of God.” According to John 7:5, Jesus’s brothers did not believe in him, but now they are part of his disciples. Probably the forty days of post-resurrection appearances led them to faith.

The word ὁμοθυμαδόν (with one accord) recurs in Acts. It can be used to refer to the unity of the opponents (Acts 7:57; 18:12; 19:29), but here it stresses the unity brought about by Jesus, in the teaching, confession, and prayer, shared by the followers of Jesus (Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 8:6; 15:25). This emphasis on unity in Acts 1:14 correlates with the gospel lesson of John 17:1–11, where Jesus prays for those whom the Father gave him, that they may be one even as Jesus and the Father are one. Acts 1 records the beginning of the fulfillment to Jesus's prayer.

Peter as the first among equals then proclaimed to the group of about 120 believers. He began with the vocative, "Men, brothers." He spoke to males who are now "brothers." Whereas in verse 14 "brothers" refers to Jesus's natural brothers, here it refers to "brothers" in the faith. Jesus creates the family of God so that he is our "brother" and we are "brothers" with him and each other. Peter explained that the Old Testament Scriptures had "to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before hand by means of the mouth of David." The Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit, and he spoke them by means of human instruments. In this case Peter was referring to Psalms 69 and 109, both Davidic psalms.

The story of Judas Iscariot is revealing in many ways, two of which are these. First, it shows the resistibility of the grace of God. Jesus himself had called Judas and numbered him among the twelve. Yet, Judas betrayed Jesus. His story serves as a warning to every follower of Jesus to "take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor 10:12). It calls for daily repentance and faith in the forgiveness of sin. Second, the story of Judas fulfilled what God himself had foretold. Even something as dark as that episode ultimately was not an unforeseen accident. The two psalms (69 and 109) focus on the hostility faced by David, the anointed king, and thereby also on the greater hostility faced by the new and greater David. Yet God will vindicate his anointed king, both the OT king and the NT King. We should not pit "rectilinear" and "typological" against each other. Both psalms refer directly to both the OT type and the NT antitype. David, inspired by the Spirit of the Messiah, was speaking as the OT occupant of the Messiah's office. Psalm 69:25 emphasizes that not one of the Twelve will continue Judas's hostility. Psalm 109:8 prays that another person would take the wicked leader's ἐπισκοπή (office, overseership).

It was important that they have twelve apostles to match the OT twelve. God has one covenant people of God, including his OT people built on the twelve sons of Israel/Jacob and his NT people built on the twelve apostles, with the Messiah Jesus as the chief cornerstone for the entire people of God.

God fulfilled the prayer of Psalm 109, not in a magical way, but through the responsible decision and action of the remaining followers. Only two men met the requirements necessary for being an eyewitness of Jesus's public ministry from the baptism of John until Jesus's ascension. The record of Jesus's public ministry was given and normed by eyewitnesses. Peter says that the man selected by God will be "a witness of his [Christ's] resurrection with us." When we bring the Christian message to people it is not enough to speak only of ideas. We must speak of history. For we do not follow cleverly devised myths. The bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is as historical as

his crucifixion under Pontius Pilate, attested by eyewitnesses. God chose Matthias to serve as an apostle and official eyewitness together with the other eleven.

Sermon Idea

The sermon could develop the theme “Built on the Twelve Apostles.” Our text narrates how Judas Iscariot was replaced by Matthias. It was necessary that the church have twelve apostles to correspond to the twelve sons of Israel/Jacob. For the church is built on the foundation of the twelve apostles, with the Messiah Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. You, by faith in Jesus the Messiah, belong to the new Israel. And this Messiah was crucified and bodily raised for you. That is not a myth but historical, testified by the official eyewitnesses of Jesus’s public ministry, such as Matthias. That is also good news for you, a promise and guarantee that you will inherit the eternal kingdom bodily together with all of God’s Israel.